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(71) Applicant(s)
Aristocrat Leisure Industries Pty Ltd

(54) Inventor(s)
Peter Causley; Chris Wiecek; Stephen Byng

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PATENTS

Our Ref: 78169
Contact: MR CHRIS O'SULLIVAN

AUSTRALIA

Patents Act 1990

PATENT REQUEST: STANDARD PATENT

We, ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD being the person(s) identified below as the Applicant, request the grant of a standard patent to the person identified below as the Nominated Person, for an invention described in the accompanying complete specification.

Full application details follow.

Applicant and Nominated Person
& Address:

ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD,
A.C.N. 001 660 715 of 85-113 Dunning Avenue,
Rosebery, New South Wales, 2018

Invention Title:

Bonus time controller

Name(s) of Actual Inventor(s):

Peter Causley; Chris Wiecek; Stephen Byng

Address for Service in Australia:

F B RICE & CO
28A Montague St
BALMAIN NSW 2041

Attorney Code: RI

ASSOCIATED PROVISIONAL APPLICATION(S) DETAILS

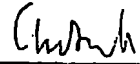
Application Number(s) and Date(s): PO3296, 29 October 1996

Drawing number recommended to accompany the abstract: Fig 1.

Dated this 29th day of October 1997

ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES
PTY LTD

By:


CHRIS O'SULLIVAN
Registered Patent Attorney

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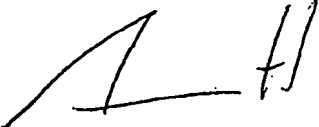
I, **HAROLD MARK HASTINGS AINSWORTH**

being authorised by **ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD**
of **85-113 Dunning Avenue, Rosebery, New South Wales, 2018**, the applicant in respect
of an application for a patent for an invention entitled "**Bonus time controller**" filed
under Australian Application No **43615/97**, state the following:-

The person nominated for the grant of the patent has, for the following reasons, gained
entitlement from the actual inventor(s):-

The nominated person would, on the grant of a patent for the invention, be
entitled to have the patent assigned to the nominated person(s).

The person nominated for the grant of the patent is the applicant of the provisional
application(s) listed on the Patent Request Form.

Signed:  Date: **3rd Nov 1997**

Status: **DIRECTOR**



AU9743615

(12) PATENT ABSTRACT (11) Document No. AU-A-43615/97
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BONUS TIME CONTROLLER

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(71) Applicant(s)
ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD

(72) Inventor(s)
PETER CAUSLEY; CHRIS WIECEK; STEPHEN BYNG

(74) Attorney or Agent
F B RICE & CO , 605 Darling Street, BALMAIN NSW 2041

(57)

The present invention relates to apparatus for use with a system of linked electronic gaming machines. In particular the apparatus provides an improved bonus time controller for use with such an electronic gaming machine system. The bonus time controller comprises means to credit a proportion of the turnover of the group of electronic gaming consoles to a bonus time pool as normal play progresses, and means to initiate periods of 'bonus time' from time to time during normal play. Additional and varied prizes are awarded from the bonus time pool to one or more of the electronic gaming consoles of the group during periods of bonus time. In another aspect the invention concerns a system of linked electronic gaming machines including an improved bonus time controller.

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ORIGINAL

**COMPLETE SPECIFICATION
STANDARD PATENT**

Invention Title:

Bonus time controller

The following statement is a full description of this invention including
the best method of performing it known to us:-

Introduction

The present invention relates to apparatus for use with a system of linked electronic gaming machines. In particular the apparatus provides an improved bonus time controller for use with such an electronic gaming machine system. In another aspect the invention concerns a system of linked electronic gaming machines including an improved bonus time controller.

Background of the Invention

Many schemes have been devised in the past to induce players to play slot machines, including schemes such as specifying periods during which jackpot prizes are increased or bonus jackpot prizes paid. Other schemes involve awarding an additional prize to a first player to achieve a predetermined combination on a poker machine after a given point in time.

These methods, while effective, add to club overheads because of the need for additional staff to ensure that the scheme is operated smoothly. More recently, with the advent of poker machines linked through electrical networks it has been possible to automatically generate jackpot prizes on the basis of information received from all the machines being played, and which are connected to the system. One such prior art arrangement, commonly known as "Cashcade", counts turnover (or games played) on all machines in the network, increments a prize value in accordance with the turnover (or number of games played) and pays a mystery jackpot prize when the count reaches some predetermined and randomly selected number. This arrangement has been in use in the State of New South Wales and in other jurisdictions for a considerable period of time. However, as with other aspects of slot machine games, players become bored with such arrangements and new and more innovative schemes become necessary in order to stimulate player interest.

Summary of the Invention

A first aspect of the present invention provides a bonus time controller for use with a group of electronic gaming consoles and a display, interconnected by a network, the bonus time controller comprising:

- means to credit a proportion of the turnover of the group of electronic gaming consoles to a bonus time pool as normal play progresses;
- means to cause the electronic gaming consoles of the group and the display means to indicate the current value of the bonus time pool;

means to initiate periods of 'bonus time' from time to time during normal play;

means to award extra prizes from the bonus time pool to one or more of the electronic gaming consoles of the group during periods of bonus time;

5 means to cause the electronic gaming consoles of the group and the display means to indicate when a period of bonus time has been initiated, the value of the prizes and the identity of the gaming console, or consoles, that have won prizes;

means to terminate periods of bonus time; and

10 means to determine a new starting amount to be credited to the bonus time pool when normal play resumes.

The bonus time controller may be arranged to initiate periods of 'bonus time' at random intervals of time. Alternatively, 'bonus time' may be initiated by a playing trigger, such as achievement of a predetermined result.

15 The bonus time controller may select whether or not a major bonus event will take place. If not, then a series of small, fixed prizes may be awarded at random to the gaming consoles currently being played.

If a major bonus event is to take place, then all combination wins on all gaming consoles in the group are multiplied.

20 Alternatively the bonus time controller may award a series of additional prizes to the consoles currently being played. At first the additional prizes may be at a small fixed value, but as the bonus period progresses the value and frequency of the prizes may increase to a crescendo before tapering off.

25 In another alternative the bonus time controller may select one or more of the gaming consoles to enter a 'bonus mode' for a predetermined period of time during which payouts are multiplied. The period of time may also be selected by the bonus time controller.

30 In a further alternative, the bonus time controller may enter all the gaming consoles currently in use, or a selected group of them, into a tournament, such as a horse race. Each gaming console is designated a horse in the race. A horse race message is displayed and then the race is run with sound and graphics being shown. The gaming console designated the winning horse wins the race and a prize.

35 In an alternatively tournament, players may take part in a guessing competition such as a red/black outcome game.

In a further alternative, all eligible machines may change the appearance of their monitors and reels to enable the players to play to accumulate the highest score. One or more prizes are then awarded according to the scores attained. Rather than automatically allowing all the machines to enter this mode players may individually elect to enter a challenge to accumulate a score determined by the controller.

A further aspect of the invention provides a bank of electronic gaming consoles, a display and a bonus time controller interconnected by a network; the bonus time controller comprises the means described above.

Bonus time controllers embodying the invention, and banks of gaming consoles including the controllers will attract new players to the bank to participate in the bonus time periods. Players at the banks of consoles will be encouraged to maximise betting rates during the bonus periods, and will enjoy additional expectation during normal play.

Where used above, the term 'console' is used to indicate a gaming machine, a gaming terminal or other device arranged to be connected to a communications system and to provide a user gaming interface. In the following description, examples are given which employ traditional slot machines, however the invention should be taken to include gaming systems which include user interfaces other than traditional slot machines.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Examples of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a group of electronic gaming machines to which a bonus time controller according to the present invention is connected;

Figure 2 is a flow chart showing a first game arrangement embodying the invention;

Figure 3 is a flow chart showing a second game arrangement embodying the invention;

Figure 4 is a flow chart showing a third game arrangement embodying the invention;

Figure 5 is a flow chart showing a fourth game arrangement embodying the present invention; and

Figure 6 is a flow chart showing a fifth game arrangement embodying the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Referring to Figure 1 a group 1 of up to, say, fifty electronic gaming machines 10 are connected to a network 11, to which a bonus time controller 12 and an external display 13 are also connected. The electronic gaming machines 10, the bonus time controller 12 and the display 13 are each equipped with a network interface 14. The network interfaces enable the bonus time controller 12 to communicate with the gaming machines 10 and the display 13, over the network 11.

Refer now also to the flowcharts of figures 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. As normal play progresses 20 a fixed percentage of the turnover of the electronic gaming machines 10, such as 2-3%, is credited to a bonus time pool. Another small percentage may also be credited to a second, hidden, pool. The bonus time controller 12 monitors the total credit in the pool and transmits this information over the network to each of the electronic gaming machines 10 and the display 13. Each of the electronic gaming machines 10 is provided with a monitor 15 on which, among other things, the current contents of the pool are displayed. The current contents of the pool are also displayed on the display 13.

The bonus time controller 12 is arranged to initiate periods of 'bonus time' 21. During periods of 'bonus time' the group of gaming machines operates in a special bonus mode. All players who have played in the last, say, thirty seconds and who still have credits remaining may be eligible to play during the 'bonus time'.

Bonus mode may be initiated at random intervals of time, or by triggers such as a specific combination win, for instance four kings. Once a primary player triggers bonus mode a defined group of other players may be included in a tournament mode. The group of players could be the five previous or subsequent players to the primary player, or they could be selected based on play. One specific player or machine can only be selected once in a specific tournament.

There are a number of variations of operation in bonus mode, but in all cases special messages and graphics such as animatronic signage and lighting effects are displayed 22, in addition to the current contents of the pool. During bonus mode the monitors on each gaming machine show the amounts won and the reduction of the contents of the pool. The lighting effects may be synchronised among the gaming machines, for instance by

moving a lighting effect such as a background colour change from one machine to another. The lighting effect may move around the machines with increasing speed and then slow to settle on the winning machine.

The bonus time period is also accompanied by special sound effects.

5 The bonus time controller 12 also determines how long a period of bonus time is to last and terminates the 'bonus time' at the end of that time 23. At the end of 'bonus time' the special messages are no longer displayed 24 and the special sound effects will cease. At the start of normal play 25 the bonus time controller 25 determines a start up amount for credit to the bonus time pool. Typically this will be taken, at least in part, from the hidden pool.

10 The flowcharts show variations in the mode of operation of the group of electronic gaming machines during 'bonus time'.

Referring now particularly to Figure 2, in this variation the bonus time controller 12 selects whether or not a major bonus event will take place 26. If not, then a series of small, fixed prizes, such as \$10-\$20, are awarded at random to the gaming machines currently being played 27. The size of the prizes and the identity of the winning machines are displayed 28.

If a major bonus event is to take place, then all combination wins on any gaming machines in the group are doubled or tripled 29. The display and monitors show the extra payouts decremented from the total until a predetermined base value is reached in the pool, when the 'bonus period' ends. The available credits and the 'bonus wins' are also displayed on the individual machine monitors during the 'bonus period' 30.

25 Referring now particularly to Figure 3, in this variation the bonus time controller 12 awards a series of additional prizes to the machines currently being played 31. The display and monitors show the size of the prizes and the identity of the winning machines, as well as indicating the nature of the bonus mode 32. At first the additional prizes are at a small fixed value, but as the bonus period progresses the value and frequency of the prizes increases to a crescendo before tapering off. The small prizes may, or may not, be decremented from the bonus time pool. Alternatively this bonus mode could end with a large win for one of the machines.

35 Referring now particularly to Figure 4, in this variation the bonus time controller 12 selects one or more of the gaming machines in the group 40 and these machines enter a 'bonus mode' for a predetermined period of time during which payouts are increased. A primary player may trigger this

feature and a number of additional players may be selected to also share in the bonus mode. The triggering player may have his winnings multiplied by five, the second selected player may have his winnings multiplied by four the third multiplied by three and fourth and fifth players may have their
 5 winnings doubled. The gaming machine monitors will display a message describing the bonus mode, the value of winnings available, the normally won amount and the factored win together with the total of winnings accumulated during bonus mode. During this bonus mode, all the participating players wager money in the ordinary way to play for the
 10 increased winnings available. As the players win, their winnings are decremented from the amount remaining in the pool until the amount reduces to zero and the feature ends.

After bonus mode, the bonus time controller 12 resets the pool value. The period of time is also selected 41 by the bonus time controller 12, and
 15 may vary from between one and three minutes. During the bonus period 42 the identity of the selected bonus machine and the prizes awarded to it are displayed on the display and monitors 43.

Referring now particularly to Figure 5, in this variation the bonus time controller 12 enters all the gaming machines currently in use into a
 20 tournament. The tournament comprises a horse race in which each machine is designated a horse in the race 50. One of the gaming machines is (secretly) selected to be the winner 51. A horse race message is displayed and then the race is run with sound and graphics being shown on all the monitors and the display 52. The gaming machine designated the winning horse wins the race
 25 and a prize 53.

In an alternative selected players may be able to play a red/black gambling tournament. In this tournament the players select red or black as an outcome within a predetermined period of time. An automatic selection is made for slower players. The players continue to make selections until
 30 they lose twice in which case they exit the tournament. Depending upon the number of rounds a player survives, they will win a prize which is deducted from the prize pool. For instance, prizes may be awarded according to the following table:

Round	Bonus Payment	Available Prize
1	0	
2	0	
3	\$10%	
4	\$20	
5	\$50	
6	\$100	Mystery \$
7	\$200	Mystery \$
8	\$200	Mystery \$

5 The final surviving player will win the balance of the pool money. The balance may be shared if all the players lose in the last round. It should be appreciated that no money is wagered in order to play this feature.

10 In another tournament, all the eligible machines change their graphics and reels to a bonus mode in which play is free and points are accumulated for a period of time. At the end of the period the player with the maximum points wins the pool money. Alternatively, the first, second and third players may all win decreasing amounts.

In an alternative, any eligible player may individually challenge for the prize by selecting a tournament mode and using their own credits to play for the prize target.

15 The prize target can consist of a predetermined amount such as 2000 points with lower prizes available for lower milestone points, as indicated below:

Previous Top Score Points	Win
2000	\$Mystery
1500	\$100
1000	\$10
	0

Alternatively a player can play to better previous top scores and then be publicly recorded on the display board.

20 Although the invention has been described with reference to particular embodiments it should be appreciated that it may be embodied in many other forms. For instance, during bonus mode already known modes of

operation may be entered. The bonus time controller may also operate to initiate a period of 'bonus time' according to other criteria or events rather than mere random time, such as a randomly selected aggregate turnover total.

5 It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A bonus time controller for use with a group of electronic gaming consoles and a display, interconnected by a network, the bonus time controller comprising:

5 means to credit a proportion of the turnover of the group of electronic gaming consoles to a bonus time pool as normal play progresses;

means to cause the electronic gaming consoles of the group and the display means to indicate the current value of the bonus time pool;

10 means to initiate periods of 'bonus time' from time to time during normal play;

means to award extra prizes from the bonus time pool to one or more of the electronic gaming consoles of the group during periods of bonus time;

15 means to cause the electronic gaming consoles of the group and the display means to indicate when a period of bonus time has been initiated, the value of the prizes and the identity of the gaming console, or consoles, that have won prizes;

means to terminate periods of bonus time; and

20 means to determine a new starting amount to be credited to the bonus time pool when normal play resumes.

2. A bonus time controller according to claim 1, wherein periods of 'bonus time' are initiated at random intervals of time.

3. A bonus time controller according to claim 1, wherein periods of 'bonus time' are initiated by a playing trigger.

25 4. A bonus time controller according to any preceding claim, wherein upon initiation of a period of 'bonus time' the bonus time controller selects whether or not a major bonus event will take place.

5. A bonus time controller according to claim 4, wherein a major bonus event is not to take place and a series of small, fixed prizes are awarded at random to the gaming consoles currently being played.

30 6. A bonus time controller according to claim 4, wherein a major bonus event is to take place, and all combination wins on all gaming consoles in the group are multiplied.

35 7. A bonus time controller according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein during bonus time the bonus time controller awards a series of additional prizes to the consoles currently being played.

8. A bonus time controller according to claim 7, wherein at first the additional prizes are of a small fixed value, and as the bonus period progresses the value and frequency of the prizes increases to a crescendo.

5 9. A bonus time controller according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein during bonus time the bonus time controller selects one or more of the gaming consoles to enter a 'bonus mode' for a predetermined period of time during which payouts are multiplied.

10 10. A bonus time controller according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein during bonus time the bonus time controller enters gaming consoles currently in use into a tournament.

15 11. A bonus time controller according to claim 10, wherein the tournament is a horse race, each gaming machine is designated a horse in the race, a horse race message is displayed, then the race is run with sound and graphics being shown, and the gaming console designated the winning horse wins the race and a prize.

12. A bonus time controller according to claim 10, wherein the tournament is a guessing competition in which each player independently guesses a result subsequently revealed by the controller.

20 13. A bonus time controller according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein during bonus time the appearance of the monitors of the gaming machines, including the reels, is changed to enable the players to play to accumulate the highest score.

14. A bonus time controller according to claim 13, wherein the players play against each other.

25 15. A bonus time controller according to claim 13, wherein the players play against a predetermined target.

16. A bonus time controller substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

17. A bank of electronic gaming consoles, a display and a bonus time controller interconnected by a network; wherein the bonus time controller comprises means according to any preceding claim.

Dated this 29th day of October 1997

ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES

PTY LTD

Patent Attorneys for the Applicant:

F.B. RICE & CO.

ABSTRACT

The present invention relates to apparatus for use with a system of linked electronic gaming machines. In particular the apparatus provides an improved bonus time controller for use with such an electronic gaming machine system. The bonus time controller comprises means to credit a proportion of the turnover of the group of electronic gaming consoles to a bonus time pool as normal play progresses, and means to initiate periods of 'bonus time' from time to time during normal play. Additional and varied prizes are awarded from the bonus time pool to one or more of the electronic gaming consoles of the group during periods of bonus time. In another aspect the invention concerns a system of linked electronic gaming machines including an improved bonus time controller.

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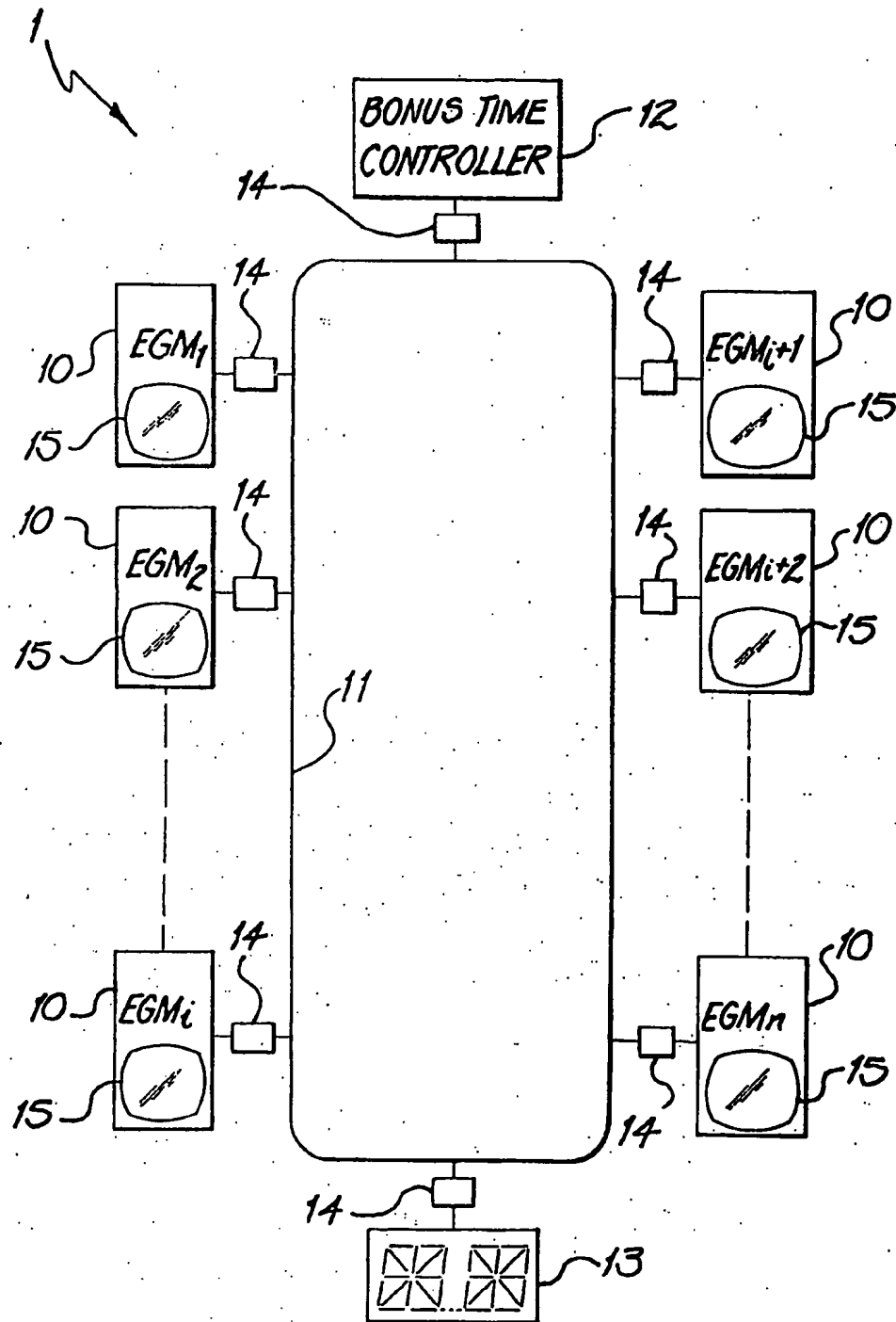


FIG. 1

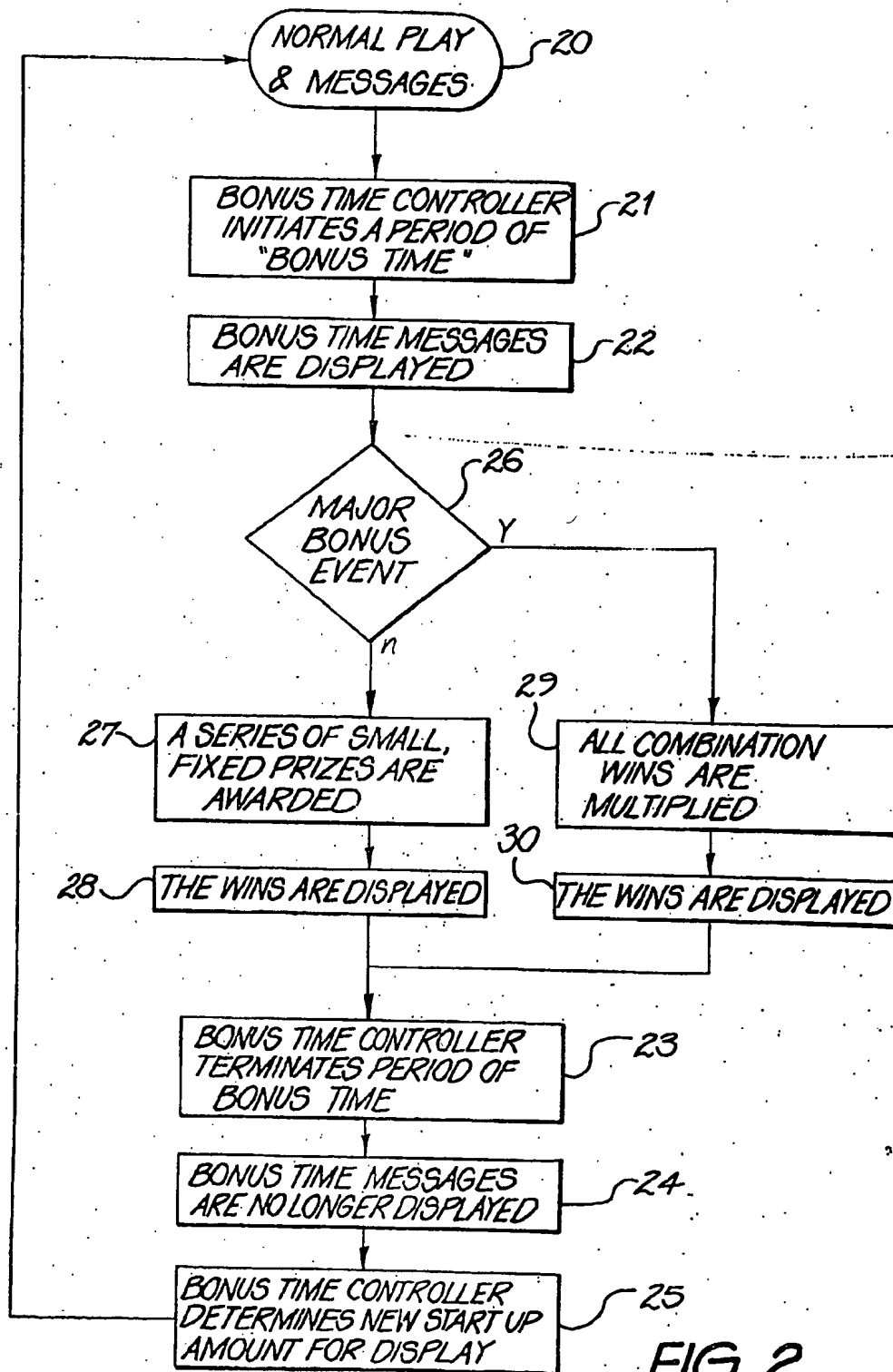


FIG. 2

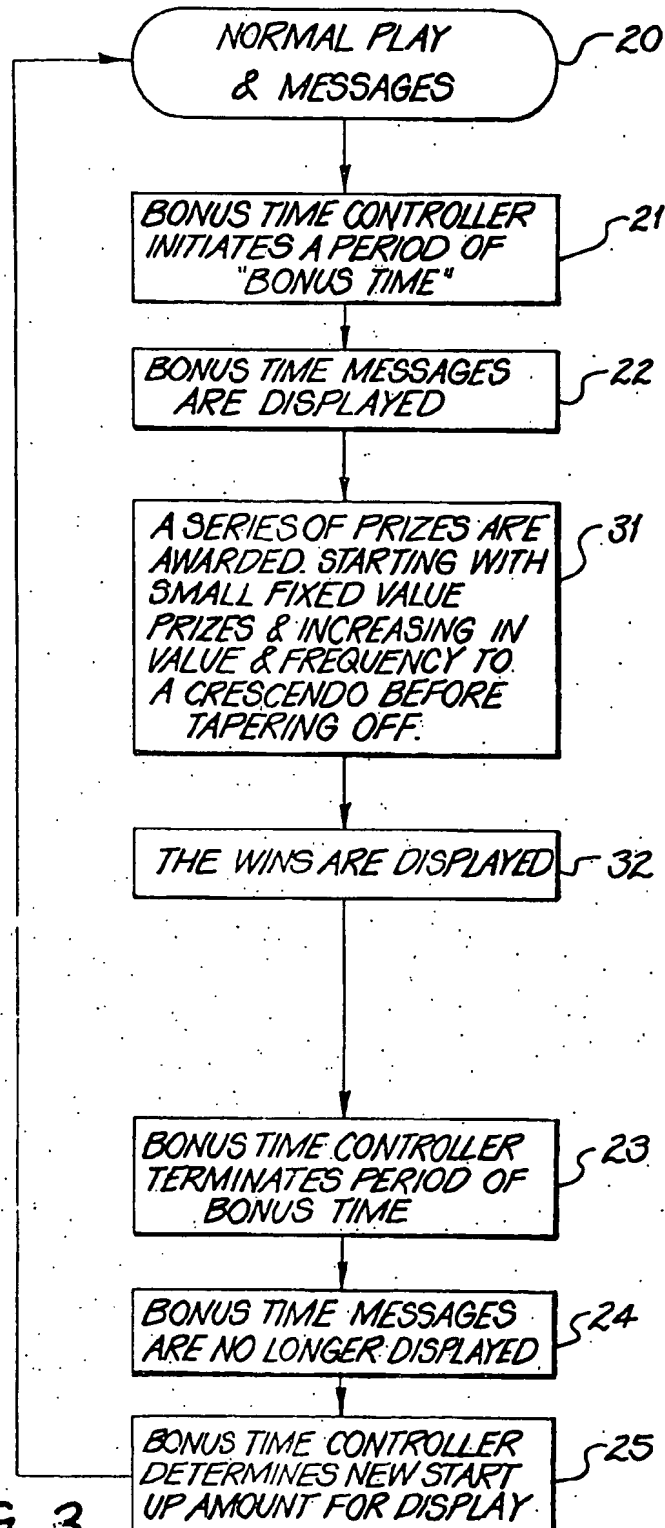


FIG. 3

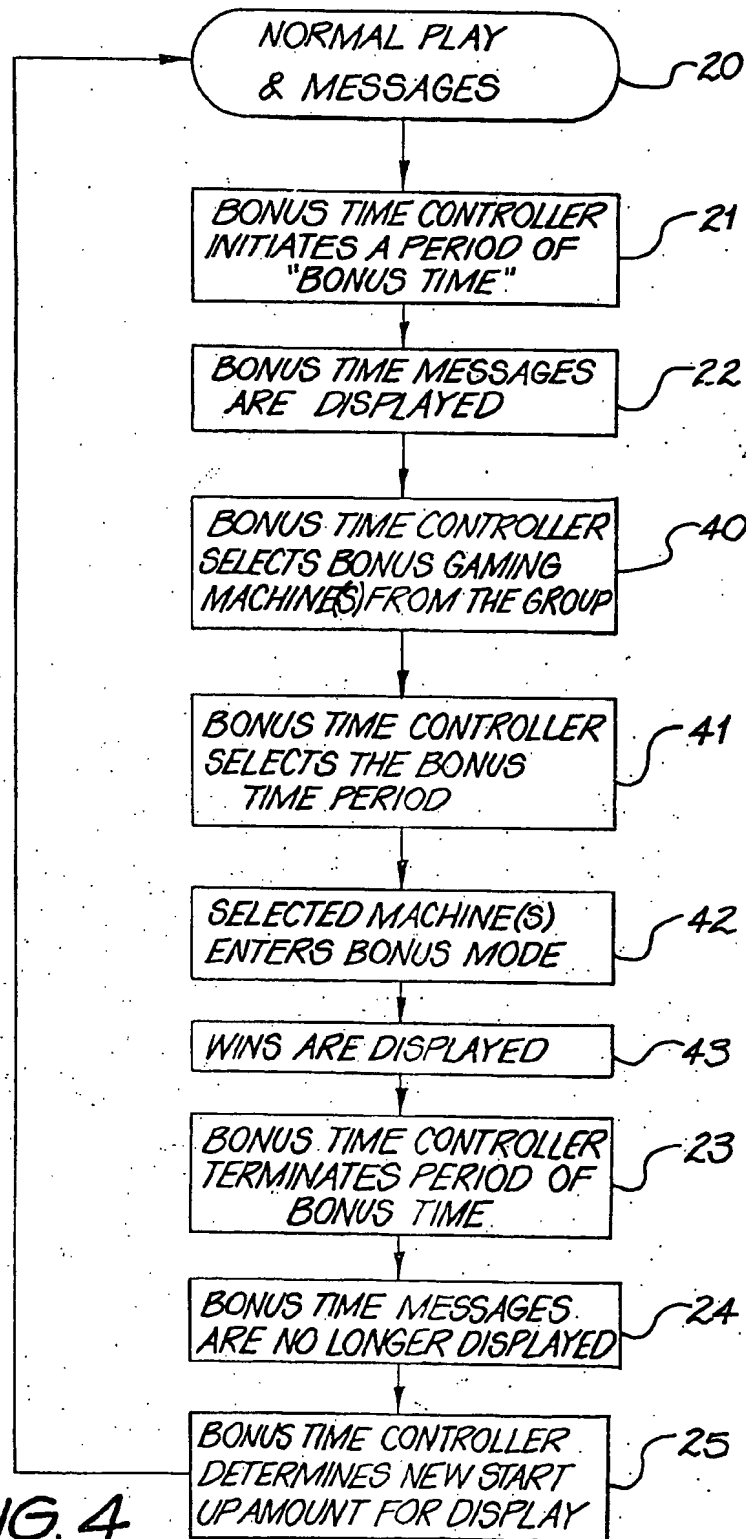


FIG. 4

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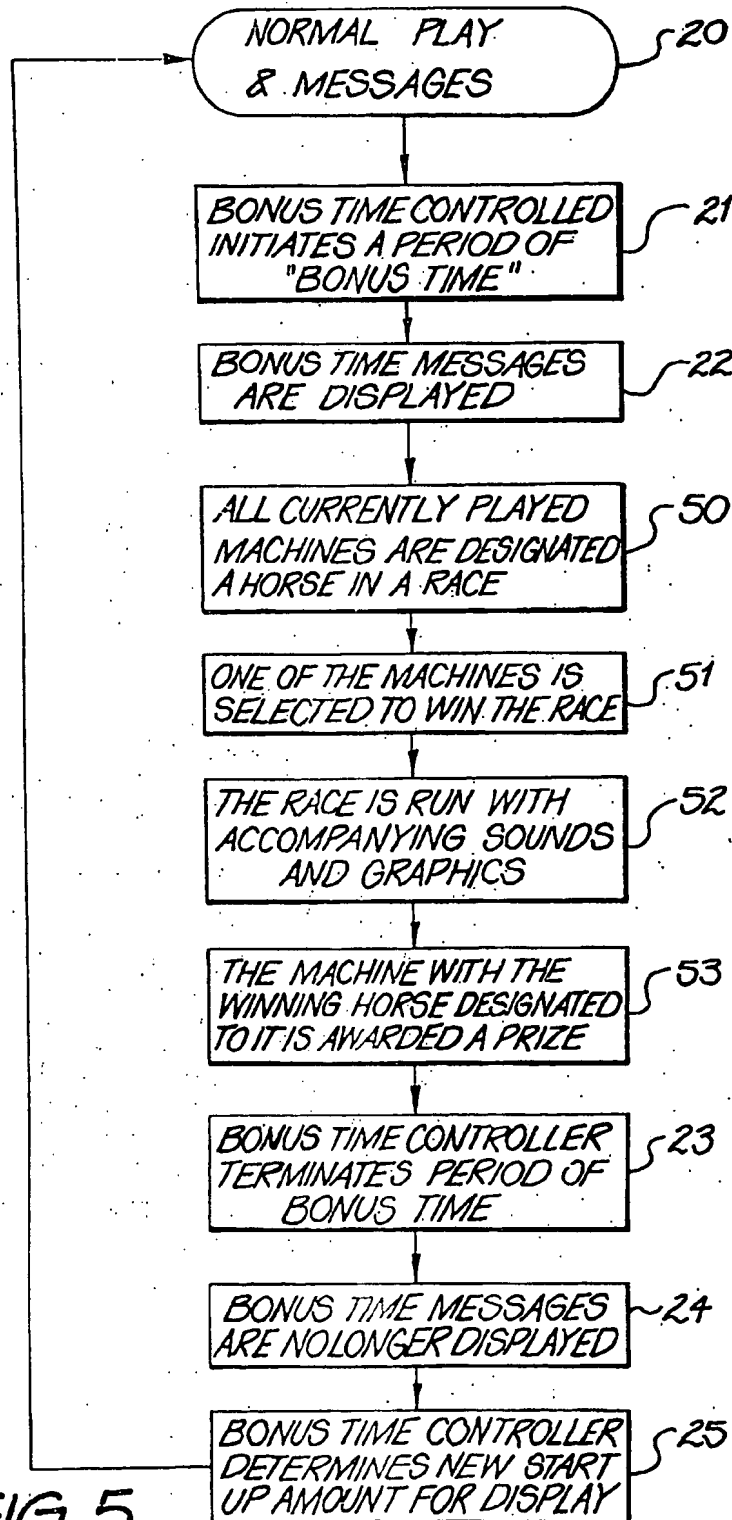


FIG. 5

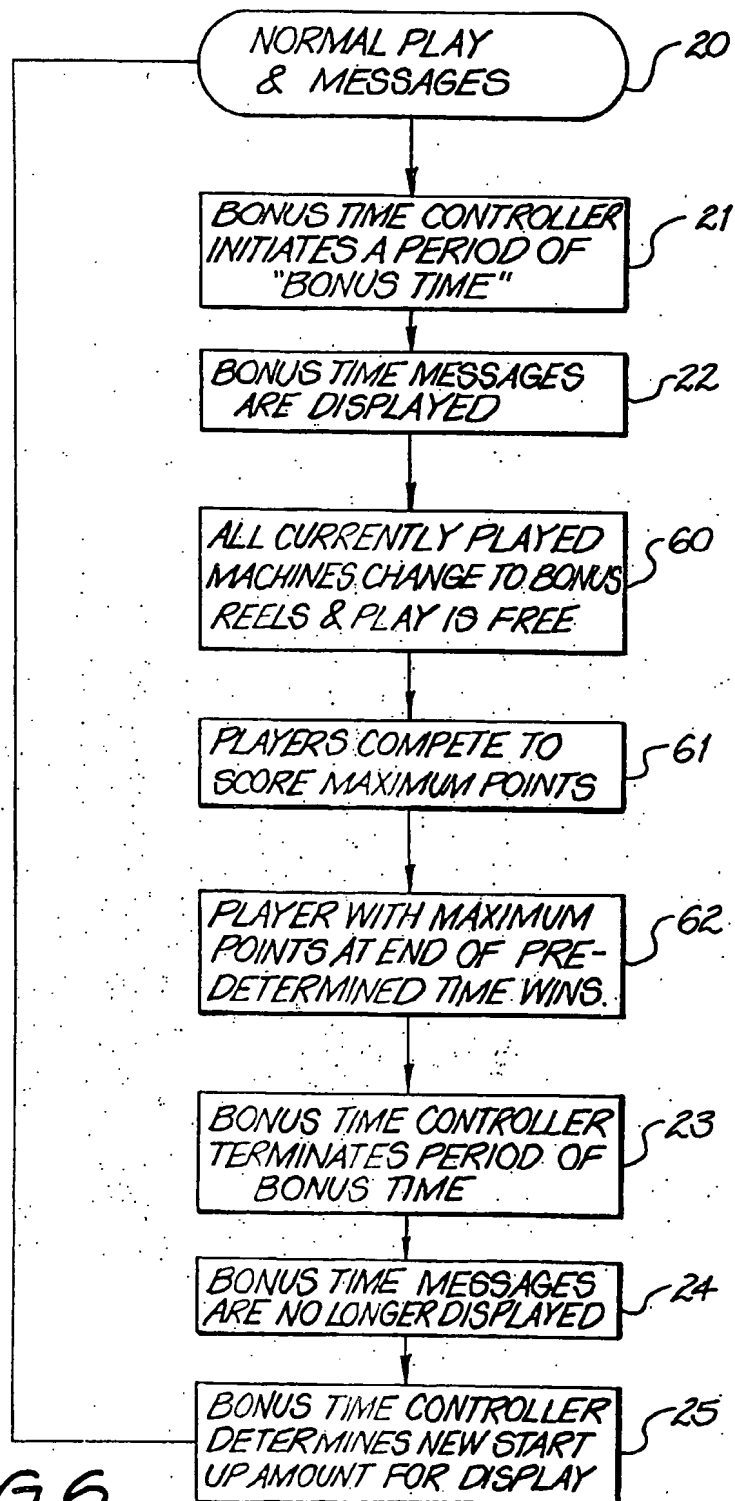


FIG. 6